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SIPDIS

SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED

DAKAR PLEASE PASS TO FAA ED JONES; DOT PLEASE PASS TO SUSAN MCDERMOTT, ORNELIA WILSON HUNTER, AND KEVIN SAMPLE; FAA PLEASE PASS TO FOREST RAWLS III; BRUSSELS PLEASE PASS TO TSA GERALD K. MOORE; HOMELAND SECURITY CENTER PLEASE PASS TO TSA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [NI](#) [EAIR](#) [EAID](#) [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [PTER](#) [CACs](#)

SUBJECT: GON AVIATION OFFICIALS DISCUSS AIRPORT SECURITY, VIRGIN NIGERIA AIRWAYS

1. (SBU) Summary. On December 8, Embassy Econ Officer, Consular Officer, and Consulate Economic Specialist traveled to Lagos Muhammed Murtala International Airport (MMIA) for talks with officials of the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria. The two sides discussed Nigeria's continued efforts to attain FAA Category I certification, improvements at MMIA to accommodate Virgin Nigeria Airways, and a December 4 confrontation at MMIA's domestic terminal after which U.S. rapper 50 Cent, fearing for his safety, cut short his Nigerian tour and returned to the United States. The Embassy/Consulate Officers also met with the military commandant of MMIA and encountered no security measures while winding their way to his office. End summary.

2. (U) On December 8, Embassy Econ Officer, Consular Officer, and Consulate Economic Specialist traveled to the Lagos headquarters of the Federal Airports Authority of Nigeria (FAAN), near Muhammed Murtala International Airport (MMIA), for talks with FAAN officials. The visitors met with Desmond Ugwuegbulem, FAAN director of airport operations; Mrs. A.A. Faworaja, FAAN general manager for airport security; and MMIA General Manager Obi Anadu, as well as two mid-level security officers. The main focus of the talks was the GON's continuing effort to attain from the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration Category I certification of Nigeria's civil-aviation sector.

3. (U) Ugwuegbulem said the FAAN considers Nigeria's efforts to achieve Category I status to be a fundamental priority. To this end, he said, the FAAN has tightened access to MMIA by different companies' small vehicles and instead will contract with a services company to provide passenger services, power units, equipment, and airport tractors. He also emphasized that the FAAN is determined to improve overall neatness at MMIA as well as the reliability and operability of its equipment. One of these improvements, Ugwuegbulem said, will be the introduction of "follow-me" vans used in parking and transit operations, including in parking aircraft in the correct space. The FAAN official said these vans will be introduced first at MMIA, and then at Abuja International Airport.

4. (U) Ugwuegbulem said that on March 2, 2005, MMIA's newly repaired runway 19 is scheduled to reopen to air traffic and that the completion of this runway project is necessary for MMIA to receive Category I certification. Related to this, Ugwuegbulem said, is MMIA's plan to increase the standardization of its equipment and to buy additional Rapidscan baggage X-ray equipment. He also noted the FAAN is installing closed-circuit television to cover MMIA's terminal A, to be followed by the airport's terminal B. Ugwuegbulem explained that this renovation of MMIA is being undertaken in part to accommodate flights of the planned Virgin Nigeria Airways, which intends to operate domestic flights from MMIA's international terminal. The FAAN official noted there will be a physical separation of international and domestic flight operations at MMIA's international terminal. According to Ugwuegbulem, MMIA's ground facilities intended for Virgin Nigeria Airways should be ready for operation by March 2005, and the GON hopes to have qualified for Category I certification by September 2005. He additionally said plans are under way to improve the airport's perimeter fencing, and that MMIA soon will have an uninterruptible power supply system for airfield lighting which would be separate from the airport's other sources of power -- generators and the National Electric Power Authority.

5. (U) In discussing funding for the FAAN, Ugwuegbulem said a budget has been sent to the Ministry of Aviation, and that the National Assembly should approve funds for the agency by the end of December 2004. Then, the official said, the FAAN will prepare a timeline for achieving Category I certification and will request the necessary international assistance. Ugwuegbulem also stated the GON increasingly will purchase its own equipment and fund its own training, and he asserted the National Assembly is increasingly aware of the need to fund civil aviation operations.

16. (U) The Economic Officer then asked about an incident on December 4, in which the entourage of touring U.S. rapper 50 Cent, a.k.a. Curtis Jackson, became involved in a confrontation at MMIA's domestic terminal. A Nigerian musician sparked this dispute, and his supporters, who likely were present as passengers, surrounded 50 Cent in his vehicle next to the rapper's intended aircraft. Fearing for his safety, 50 Cent cut short his Nigerian tour and after of a tense delay of at least several hours, proceeded to MMIA's international terminal and then to the United States.

17. (SBU) Although 50 Cent claimed through his recording label, which contacted the U.S. Consulate in Lagos for assistance, that three vanloads of Lagos "area boys" (criminal hooligans) arrived on the tarmac to surround his plane, both Ugwuegbulem and Faworaja said vans carrying the Nigerian musician's supporters could not have bypassed airport security measures, and that 50 Cent's opponents instead likely were passengers waiting to board a second, nearly simultaneous flight to Port Harcourt -- 50 Cent's intended destination. Ugwuegbulem asserted that 50 Cent should have had at least two policemen with him, while Faworaja said the affair was primarily the fault of the airline supplying the chartered aircraft. Ugwuegbulem explained that FAAN personnel mediated at the scene of the confrontation and defused the situation, then escorted 50 Cent away from the domestic terminal. (Begin comment: While no one was reported seriously injured in the "50 Cent affair," the Nigerian press reported that the confrontation and resulting standoff lasted five hours. The FAAN, as noted, mediated at the scene and defused the situation, but airline and airport officials first allowed matters to mushroom quickly, then needed at least several hours to regain control. Media reports on this incident, including in the international press, did nothing to improve Nigeria's reputation for lawlessness or deficient security and law enforcement. End comment.)

18. (SBU) Discussion then turned to Virgin Nigeria Airlines' seeking approval for U.S. landing rights. Ugwuegbulem opined that the GON was not "very happy" with the Virgin Nigeria deal, because the U.S. Government might consider the airline a UK entity. The FAAN official also said he didn't believe the GON was linking Continental Airlines' request to begin direct flights to Nigeria with Virgin Nigeria's quest for U.S. landing rights. (Begin comment: Continental Airlines announced on December 9 that Nigeria had approved direct Continental flights between New York and Lagos, which Continental expects will begin in the second quarter of 2005. End comment.) At this point, Mrs. Faworaja said there is very strong public pressure in Nigeria for the GON to approve direct flights to the United States. According to Ugwuegbulem, this is because of the recurring visa unpleasantness Nigerian passengers encounter in Europe, and especially in the United Kingdom, where Nigerians cannot receive a UK transit visa in fewer than three days. This causes many Nigerians either to be stranded in British airports or to have to return to Nigeria without having reached their destination. Largely because of this situation, Ugwuegbulem said, the GON is "barely managing to accommodate" the Virgin Nigeria Airways deal, which is caught in the middle of a dispute over U.S. airlines' access to European Union routes. (Begin comment: A U.S. Department of Transportation official informed the Economic Counselor on December 8 that the United States will not approve Virgin Nigeria Airways' application for U.S. landing rights. End comment.)

19. (SBU) Following these talks with the FAAN officials, the Embassy/Consulate officers traveled to MMIA to meet with Nigerian Air Force Group Captain M. Tizhe, the military airport commandant. According to both Tizhe and the FAAN, Tizhe is in effect the co-commander of MMIA but would assume control of the facility, as well as of MMIA's domestic terminal, in case of a civil disturbance. Tizhe was very cordial to the Embassy/Consulate officers, but said his need to follow his military chain of command limited what he could discuss. Tizhe instead directed the visitors to contact his superiors in Abuja -- specifically, the chief of Defense Intelligence -- if they wished further information about Tizhe's responsibilities. Tizhe did say he was a member of Nigeria's Airport Security Committee, which is composed of representatives of the relevant federal entities, is headed by the airport manager as the FAAN's representative, and meets once a month or as needed. (Begin comment: The MMIA terminal has three main floors. Tizhe's office was located on the third, smaller floor of administrative and security offices located above the top terminal floor. The Embassy/Consulate officers neither encountered security measures nor passed through security checkpoints while entering MMIA's departure terminal, from which they ascended to its third floor to Tizhe's office. The Embassy/Consulate officers also wandered this labyrinth of hallways freely in search of Tizhe's office, which was

located nearly opposite that of the MMIA police commander.
This surprising lack of security at Nigeria's major
international airport demonstrated the GON still faces
challenges in its quest to receive Category I certification.
End comment.)

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